



86: Sugar, Sugar by cali-chan

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There was a sputtering sound as the car shuddered to a stop.

Sitting at the wheel, El glared at the dashboard like it had personally offended her. "I think your car is broken."

In the back seat, Mike had to bite his lip to keep himself from laughing. In the passenger seat, Hopper sighed. "My car is not broken; you're just not doing what I'm telling you to do." He ran a hand over his eyes and explained again. "You have to let go of the clutch at the same speed as you step on the gas pedal..."

As he spoke, the car started rolling forward. "There. See? I knew you could do it," Hopper said proudly.

This time, Mike couldn't hold back a snort. "Um, the car's not on," he pointed out matter-of-factly.

It took a couple of seconds for that comment to register with Hopper, and then he turned to his daughter with an unamused look. "Okay, quit it," he warned her, in that tone he used whenever she skipped actual dinner and went straight for the Eggos.

She didn't quit it. Instead, she kept the car rolling slowly forward. "You said I should learn to drive in case of an emergency," she started in a practical tone. "In an emergency, I can just do this," she finished with a shrug. Her ponytail swung behind her as she moved, giving her an air of innocence.

Mike laughed. "I think she got you with your own logic there, Chief,"

he quipped, chuckling to himself. The way El and Hopper interacted with each other never ceased to both amuse him and amaze him.

"Not helping," Hopper barked at him over his shoulder before turning to El again. "You can't use your powers to drive a car," he declared, gesturing at her to stop the vehicle already.

"Why not?" El retorted once again with that same innocent tone, all big eyes and sweet smiles. "It's easier than lifting it."

Mike guffawed. Hopper glared. "Funny," he stated in a dry tone that made it clear he thought it was everything but. He shook his head. "You know what? Pull over. It's Wheeler's turn."

El huffed in protest but did as she was told anyway. It's not like she was in a hurry to learn how to drive anyway— she was only trying because Hopper said it was good to know, just in case, and they could kill two birds with one stone this way.

She and Mike switched places, Mike getting behind the wheel with some more confidence than El had. Driving wasn't new to him. He'd gotten his learner's permit shortly after his sixteenth birthday and was now in the process of logging his 50 hours of driving with a licensed supervisor so he could transition to a probationary license and finally be able to drive on his own.

When the time came to find an adult to supervise him, his dad couldn't be bothered, Nancy and Jonathan were only around for the holidays, and even when they were in Hawkins, they were not 25 yet, and neither was Steve. He thought for a while of asking Lucas's dad, but he was already supervising both Lucas and Dustin. That meant Mike generally practiced with his mother in the station wagon, since that's what he'd be driving now that Nancy was gone, anyway.

The problem was that most of the time, his mother was busy doing... *everything*, it seemed to him, and even when she did have time, she micromanaged his every move, and they usually ended up arguing for the last three-quarters of the drive. He loved his mom, he really did, but he could only take so much of that, and 50 hours was *way* past the limit of his patience.

So when Hopper offered to help supervise his driving (read: when El cajoled him into "volunteering"), Mike jumped at the chance. The chief only had time during the weekends, so he still had to drive with his mother at least a couple times a week, but the gruff man actually turned out to be a pretty decent teacher, so long as Mike took it seriously. The only issue they generally had was that Hopper's truck was a stick shift, which Mike still wasn't quite used to, but after a few weeks of practice, he was starting to get the hang of it.

Well, mostly.

Giggles erupted from the backseat when the car sputtered to a halt... *again*. Mike groaned. Hopper smirked. "Would it help if I got out and pushed?" El asked between snickers.

Mike gaped, turning to look at her over his shoulder. "The only reason I'm not glaring at you right now is because that was a *Star Wars* quote," he declared in a squeak, eyebrows high under his fringe. His expression made El giggle harder.

"Alright, alright, you can flirt on your own time," Hopper intervened, shaking his head, although both teens had dealt with him enough to know that it was mostly affectionate. "Try again, kid. You know how to do this."

The second attempt was a no-go, too. "Sure you don't want my help?" El offered again, still chortling. "I don't even need to get out of the car, I can do it from here—"

"No," both Mike and Hopper snapped back, though they both meant it for different reasons. Thankfully, no more telekinetic driving was needed that day, as Mike's third try was the charm and they drove down a deserted Denfield without any other troubles.

They drove the long way 'round town in easy companionship, Mike focused on the road as Hopper recounted some of the most ridiculous "cases" he'd had to deal with through his years working in Hawkins, while El turned the dials on the radio from the back seat with her mind, looking for a station that was playing something from that decade.

They made their way downtown over an hour later, stopping at a convenience store to buy some groceries and a small bouquet of flowers per El's request, and then Hopper dropped the two teenagers (and Mike's bike) off at Benny's Diner, with a reminder that he'd be picking El up at the Wheelers' around 10.

They walked in hand in hand and, as usual whenever they came here to eat, headed straight for the framed photo of Benny Hammond the new owners had hung in a corner of the back wall. Under the photo there was a small table littered with smaller photo frames and other knickknacks people sometimes brought in to remember good old Benny. There was also a small vase with a bunch of dried-up flowers that El took out and replaced with the new bouquet she'd brought.

She stretched out a hand to fondly touch the frame of the larger picture, Mike solemnly standing by her side. It was a bit of a routine they went through every time they came in, with El wanting to pay respects to the first person who was nice to her, the first person to die because of her.

"Miss Jane," they heard a voice call out to them and they both turned around to see who it was. "Mike. You're earlier than usual today," the old man pointed out with a smile as he approached them, wiping his greasy hands on a white piece of fabric that looked like an apron.

"Hi, Earl," El greeted him back with a warm smile, Mike nodding in kind. The man and a small group of Benny's old friends had chipped in and bought the diner after his death, and decided to keep it open in his memory. None of them knew El had been the kid from that day — no one outside of those directly involved with the conspiracy knew— but they knew Benny had been good friends with Jim Hopper from back in high school, so it didn't really raise eyebrows that Jim's daughter would periodically bring flowers for their little memorial.

Mike threw an arm around El's shoulders— not an unusual sight around the diner, either. "Yeah, we can't eat here today," he explained easily. "Gotta babysit my little sister tonight, so we're taking our food to go."

"Three burger platters with the works, then?" Both teens nodded. "You should get some milkshakes while you wait, though. I hear the

heat is impossible out there," the man suggested, and he was right, honestly, so the couple marched over to a booth, deciding to share a strawberry shake as they waited for their order to be ready.

Mike only took a few sips to cool himself down but gave up soon as the sweetness got a bit overwhelming. El, of course, had no problem finishing the milkshake all on her own. "I love sugary things," she commented as she took a sip.

"Yeah, I'm aware," he retorted with an amused smile before leaning in to steal a kiss. The flavor of the milkshake wasn't nearly as cloying when he tasted it off his beautiful girlfriend's lips.

For the next few minutes they talked a little bit about everything—from their friends' latest shenanigans to where they would go once Mike finally got his driver's license. They had big dreams of adventures outside of Hawkins, and they always had a lot of fun thinking up some more.

When their food was ready, the duo said goodbye to Earl and biked back to Mike's house, where they found Mike's mom almost on her way out the door for a girls' night. "Okay, you two, you know the rules," she reminded them as she walked around the living room making sure everything was in order. "No going down to the basement by yourselves, don't let Holly go to bed too late..."

"Okay, Mom," Mike responded, trying hard not to roll his eyes. It was the same diatribe any time he had to watch Holly for the night. She hadn't given Nancy this much grief back when *she* used to do this, had she?

"Now, the number for the restaurant I'm gonna be at is by the phone," Karen continued, "and I left some cookies in a bowl for after dinner, but don't let Holly have too many, you know how she gets with sugar..."

"Yes, and we won't burn the house down and no one will run off to join the circus in the middle of the night," Mike added in a deadpan tone, prompting his mother to glare at him. "We'll be *fine*, Mom," he assured her. "Just go have fun. We'll be here when you get back."

"Okay," she said, trying to smile. "Thanks for doing this, sweetie." She leaned forward to give him a kiss he couldn't dodge. "Holly! Come here and say goodbye to Mom, honey." When the seven-year-old rushed over, Karen gave her a kiss and told her to be good. "Stay with your brother at all times, okay? I should be back around 10:30." She waved at El, who was sitting on the living room couch, and finally walked out the door.

They decided to have dinner before the burgers got cold, and Holly didn't even put much of a fuss about the vegetables on hers. Mike attributed it to the fact that Eleven was with them— Holly was always in a good mood when his girlfriend was around, probably because that meant Mike let her have Eggs for dessert.

That night, however, they had cookies, which Holly promptly went to grab as Mike knelt in front of their movies shelf, looking for something the three of them could watch. "Did you get your license today?" she asked him from the couch right before biting into a sugar cookie.

"I'm still practicing," he mumbled in response, still more concerned with the movies in front of him. *An American Tail?* Holly liked that one, even though it always made her afraid of cats for a little while after watching it.

"When can *I* drive a car?" his sister asked him in a curious tone, still munching on dessert.

He looked at her over his shoulder. "Judging from the state of your Barbie Corvette, I'd say... when you're thirty-seven," he retorted with a smirk.

She stuck her tongue out at him. "*Meanie*," she declared, crossing her arms in affront. "Jane! Mike's being mean!"

"Mike, stop being mean to your sister," El declared as she came into the living room, just coming back from washing her hands. "You know she didn't dent the Corvette, it was Ken."

"Boys are stupid," Holly declared, hand diving into the bowl to pick up another cookie. El wondered how many she'd eaten already, and

whether she should take the bowl away from her already.

Mike rolled his eyes. "Well, if I'm so stupid, you'll have to find someone else to tell you stories, then." He kept browsing through the VHS tapes. Holly pursed her lips and refrained from comment. Mike *did* tell the best stories.

"Fievel okay?" he asked El, who nodded at the choice.

Holly, however, stood up with a huff. "I wanna watch *Archie*!" She walked to the shelf and knelt down beside him, pulling out one of the VHS tapes labeled "Cartoons" and handing it to Mike in a regal fashion.

Mike groaned. "Holls, you literally watch *The Archie Show* every day." The girl said nothing, but she did shake the tape at him in an authoritarian fashion. He turned to look at El, who just shrugged, before sighing. "Okay, fine," he gave in, taking the tape from his sister and pushing it into the player.

He went back to the couch and sat down beside El, but before he could pull her to him, Holly snuck in and sat down right between them. Mike glared down at the top of her blond head, situated right between their shoulders. "Really, Holly?"

The girl turned puppy eyes on him. "Mom said," she retorted innocently, as if that was explanation enough. Mike rolled his eyes, but the whole situation made El laugh, so in the end he had to concede that it wasn't that bad.

After two tapes, nearly three hours and more 60s bubblegum pop music than any person needed to hear in their lifetime, Holly finally fell asleep, resting her head against Mike's arm. El was just about to point this out to him when she realized Mike was asleep as well, his head thrown back against the wall, mouth slightly open.

El had to hold back a coo. They were just too adorable. And she hated disturbing them when they looked so comfortable, she really did, but it was nearly nine and she'd been hoping to get some time alone with her boyfriend all day, so in a sense, it was basically an emergency.

"Mike?" she whispered, trying at least not to disturb Holly's sleep. "Mike," she tried again when her first call didn't work. She touched his knee lightly, and that seemed to do the trick.

"Hmm," he mumbled as he woke up. "Whuzzit?" El couldn't keep herself from giggling at that. The hair on the back of his head was all mussed from resting against the wall, and he was looking at her through squinty eyes because he couldn't seem to open them all the way. He was so cute, it made her really want to kiss him.

"Holly's asleep," she let him know instead, pointing down at the little girl.

Mike followed her gaze down to where Holly was resting against his side and nodded. "Mmkay. I'll take her to her room." He still sounded sleepy, but he started to get up carefully, trying not to wake his sister.

It was inevitable, however, when he picked her up off the couch. "Mikey?" came her similarly somnolent voice, and he felt her head move against the side of his face.

"Yeah, it's me," he responded, adjusting her weight in his arms. Carrying her was a lot easier when she was three. "Just taking you to bed so you can be more comfortable. Hang on."

Holly tightened her arms and legs around him. "Will you tell me a story?" she asked in a small, hopeful voice. He'd meant to come back downstairs straight away so he could spend some time alone with his girlfriend, but he couldn't say no to his sister.

"Sure, okay," he conceded like the sucker that he was, and felt her rest her cheek against his shoulder, like she used to when she was little. He turned to tell El that he'd be right back, and found her smiling fondly at him. "What?" he asked her, curious.

She shook her head, still smiling, then took a step closer to him and stepped up on her tippy toes to kiss his cheek. When she pulled back, he asked her, "What's that for?" Not that he was complaining or anything, he just wanted to know.

Because I love you, was what she wanted to say, but she didn't. She couldn't. Instead, she shrugged. "You're sweet," she said, still smiling, and that was true, as well. Sugary things, indeed.

He chuckled. "Well, if that's what I get for babysitting Holly, then I'm going to have to do it more often!" he quipped, blushing a little.

She giggled as well, leaning in to whisper in his ear. "We still have some time before Dad comes to pick me up," she reminded him pointedly. He'd been asleep, so he probably wasn't aware of the hour. "If you're quick with that story..."

"On my way," he declared before her voice even trailed off, suddenly all too eager to put his sister to sleep. She laughed at his enthusiasm as he made his way up the stairs as quickly as he could with a little girl in his arms.

El sat back down on the couch to wait for him and thought about the words that had almost come out of her mouth. She knew, both from her favorite TV shows and from other people's experiences she'd heard about in real life, that telling your significant other that you loved them was a big deal. You were only supposed to say it when you really meant it. When you really felt it.

She knew she felt it; there wasn't a doubt in her mind about that. She loved her dad, she loved her friends, but Mike was her everything. The most important person in her life. And she knew with a certainty that was almost scary that that was never going to change. She was in love with him, and that was that.

And normally she didn't have any problem telling people what she was thinking, what she was feeling. Her friends often joked that she hadn't developed a "filter" yet, that she was radically blunt in a way most people weren't, because they were afraid of what other people would think. El didn't think she had any need to be afraid of expressing herself— not around the people she loved, at least. She knew they accepted her no matter what, so why should she keep her thoughts from them? It was especially easy with Mike, because he would never judge her, and he always understood her.

In this case, however... she did feel afraid. Not because she thought

he didn't care— of course he did, they'd been dating for years and she didn't doubt his feelings for her. But she did worry that maybe he wasn't ready to hear those words, let alone say them back. She was certain what she felt was love, but what if he wasn't? What if it was too early? What if he wasn't ready? Max had told her once that all boys were afraid of "commitment." Was this what she meant?

She didn't want to push him into *having* to reciprocate. Should she not say it first, then? Maybe she was worrying too much. She should just enjoy their relationship as it had been so far, as it was right now. It didn't really matter if the words were said, anyway, or who said them first; all that mattered was that they were together.

After a few minutes of sitting there thinking, she decided to go upstairs for a bit to use the bathroom. On her way back she stopped at the doorway to Holly's room, and as she peeked in she saw that Mike had just finished tucking his sister in. The little girl pulled at her brother's sleeve to grab his attention and Mike sat down beside her on the bed, ready to start on that story he promised.

He thought about what to say for a second. "There once was a princess who had lived her whole life trapped in a dark, scary tower," he started as Holly cuddled up to his side, paying rapt attention. "She didn't know much about the world outside her tower, but she was smart and determined, and she wanted to be free. So one day, when her evil stepfather was distracted, she managed to escape, and she ran into the forest trying to get as far away from him as she could."

He raised his gaze and caught sight of Eleven, leaning against the doorframe with her arms crossed, soft gaze locked on the two of them. Her eyes met his and Mike smiled. She smiled back, the light from the hallway creating almost a halo around her, and his breath caught for a second. God, she was so beautiful.

He had to shake himself out of that thought in order to continue the story. "That night, three brave knights were also out in the forest, looking for a friend who had been taken by a dragon just the day before. It was raining, and cold, and dark, but their friend was in danger, so they couldn't waste any time. They set out to find the dragon's lair, but instead, they found someone else..." Out of the corner of his eye he saw El walk away from the doorway and down

the hall toward the stairs, and already he couldn't wait to get back down there and join her.

Once Holly was finally back asleep, he went down to the living room to find El sitting on the couch, bowl of sugar cookies in her lap, the television still playing old *Archie* reruns. He stood there for a second and smirked. "Really?" he asked, signaling to the TV.

El shrugged. "I like the music."

He chuckled as he moved toward the couch. "Well, at least it's better than soap operas," he declared, teasing. She tried to kick him for that one as he stepped over her outstretched legs, but it was all in good fun. He sat down beside her and pulled her to him with one arm around her shoulders.

"So, did the brave knights save the princess?" she asked as she made herself comfortable against his side, resting her head against his shoulder.

He kissed the top of her head. "I'm pretty sure she saved them," he replied as he rested his cheek against the place he had just kissed. She couldn't help but smile, pressing a kiss of her own to the corner of his jaw.

With his free hand he signaled to the bowl she was holding. "You want a cookie?" she asked as she handed it to him.

"Maybe later," he responded, stretching his arm to put the bowl down on the side table by the armrest of the couch, before turning back to his girlfriend and leaning in to kiss her deeply.

She sighed contentedly against his mouth, dropping her feet from the coffee table so she could rearrange her position in a way that allowed her to be as close to him as possible. She wrapped her arms around his neck and used that leverage to arch against him, but even that was a little uncomfortable because they were sitting sideways on the couch and the angle was awkward.

One of his hands was in her hair, unwittingly loosening her ponytail, and the other one was pulling her to him by her waist. The only way

they could be as close as they both obviously wanted to get was for her to be straddling his lap, so that's what she did, drawing a groan from him as her weight settled on his legs and his hands moved to hold her by her hips.

They broke apart for a moment and Mike moved to pepper kisses down her throat. "I've been waiting to do this for the entire day," he whispered breathlessly against her neck, breathing in the sweet scent that was her.

"Me too," she gasped, not just because of what his lips were doing, but also because his hands were caressing her thighs, and every time his fingers touched her bare skin that was left uncovered by her jean shorts, she felt electricity run down her spine.

"Can we just stay like this forever?" he asked, nuzzling his nose against the smooth, perfect curve where her neck met her shoulder.

She giggled in response. "We can stay like this for about forty-five minutes," she reminded him, ducking her head so she could catch his lips again. He complied immediately, opening his mouth against hers as he gave into and more than shared her eagerness.

He hummed into her mouth, not entirely happy that they didn't have more time to spend together, but hell, if they only had forty-five minutes before the chief came to pick her up, then he intended to make the most of them. "Okay," he said as soon as they parted for a second. "Hold on."

She was about to ask what he meant when he wrapped his arms around her waist and turned sideways, turning her along with him. She let out an "eep!" as she scrambled to grab hold of his shoulders for support, but just as quickly he was laying her down against the sofa cushions, propping himself up on his forearms so he could hover over her. "Sorry," he said sheepishly when he noticed her wide eyes.

She shook her head sharply. "Just kiss me," she all but demanded and it was Mike's turn to be caught by surprise when she pulled him down by the collar of his t-shirt until their lips met again. He didn't mind one bit.

Archie kept on playing in the background, completely unheeded. They didn't even notice when the VCR player hit the end of the tape. Needless to say, they had more pressing priorities at the moment.

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Notes: I feel like this is a bit all over the place, but that might just be because I went with this omniscient-ish type... thing, rather than sticking to one PoV like I usually do. I dunno, guys, you tell me what you think. I just wanted to write about Hopper giving them driving lessons, and then somehow the making out took over? It happens. LOL. xD

I generally assume (if only from the lack of gear shifting seen on the show) that Hopper's Blazer is an automatic, but I'm making it a stick shift here simply because I needed it to be a manual to fit the scene. Similarly (and thanks to everybody who chimed in about this last time, you helped a lot!), the rules for obtaining a probationary driver's license in Indiana were probably a lot looser in the 80s than I make it sound here, but I decided to stick to *current* Indiana law for the purposes of this story, which states that Mike can get a learner's permit without taking Drivers' Ed when he turns 16, and after 270 days and 50 hours of driving with a licensed supervisor over 25, he'll be allowed to get his probationary license. It just works better with this scenario. Artistic license is the bomb. ;)

El teases Mike with a Princess Leia quote from *Empire Strikes Back*. Earl was one of Benny's friends, the one who first tells Hopper about El in season 1. I chose strawberry for their milkshake because that's the flavor of ice cream Benny gave El in episode 1. *An American Tail* is a 1986 Don Bluth animated film about a family of Jewish mice who get separated while emigrating to the USA and have to deal with a gang of evil cats. The Barbie Corvette has been produced by Mattel in association with Chevrolet since the 1970s. Ken (aka Barbie's boyfriend) is also property of Mattel. *The Archie Show* and subsequent spin-offs were cartoons based on the *Archie* comic books that aired on CBS from 1968 on. The initial run of the show revolved around the adventures of a fictional band called The Archies, which even

released several hit records in real life. The franchise was mostly absent from television during the 80s, at least until fall 1987, so Holly would be watching re-runs at this point.

The title comes from the song of the same name by The Archies (yes, that same fictional band I just mentioned in the last paragraph), which is one of the most famous songs of all time, let's be honest. I chose it mainly because this story is basically nothing but *utter teeth-rotting fluff*. But also because, in a convoluted way, this idea reminded me of the more lighthearted moments from the coming-of-age movies of my formative years, such as *Stand by Me*, *My Girl* and *Now and Then*, and the latter will forever be associated with the song *Sugar*, *Sugar* in my mind. IDK, just go with it, folks.